



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

****NEWS RELEASE****

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Third-grade reading test results soar

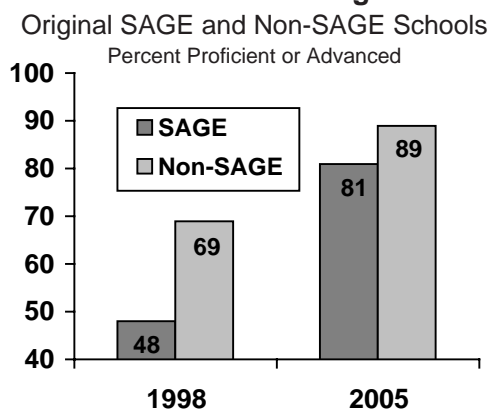
MADISON—Proficiency scores for the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test (WRCT) soared for 2005 with 87.4 percent of third-graders scoring proficient or advanced on the statewide exam, the highest level in the history of the test.

“Our third-grade students did a wonderful job on this challenging test of reading comprehension,” said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster. “More students took the test, and they achieved at higher levels than ever before. It is especially encouraging that results improved across all groups of students as we continually strive to close the achievement gap.”

Of the state’s 59,453 public school third-graders, 96.2 percent took the WRCT in the spring. The percentage scoring in the top two proficiency levels was up 2.5 points from 2004 and up 22.6 points from 1998, the first year WRCT scores were reported at the minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced proficiency levels. Just 8.8 percent of students scored at the minimal and basic proficiency levels this year, compared to 25.9 percent in 1998.

Burmaster noted that progress in improving reading achievement is particularly noticeable for students in the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, the state’s initiative to reduce class sizes and provide more individualized attention in high-poverty schools. In 1998, there was a 21-point difference in the percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced between the original 27 SAGE schools and non-SAGE schools. This year, the gap closed to 8 percentage points.

Difference in WRCT Reading Proficiency



(more)

“The SAGE program is showing results, and we’ve seen it again this year,” Burmaster said.

“SAGE works to close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their peers. That is why it is especially important to maintain the present structure of SAGE, our K-3 class-size reduction effort. It would be very short-sighted to dismantle this program, which is showing tremendous results.”

Statewide, the gap between economically disadvantaged students and their peers is 16 percentage points for students scoring proficient or advanced. It

was 25 percentage points in 1998 when 28 percent of students were from low-income families. Today, 32 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch. In school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty (50 percent or more students), 79 percent of students scored proficient or advanced; 95 percent of students scored at the top two proficiency levels in districts with between 5 percent and 24.9 percent poverty rates.

While the achievement gap persists for students of color, the percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced has climbed over the past eight years for all racial/ethnic groups. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was African American, 69 percent; American Indian, 82 percent; Asian, 81 percent; Hispanic, 70 percent; and white, 92 percent.

Compared to 1998 scores, the largest closing of the gap was for Asian and limited-English proficient (LEP) students. Scores for students with limited-English proficiency lagged

30 percentage points behind their English-proficient peers, a gap that was 52 percentage points in 1998 when just 3 percent of students had limited English-language skills. Today, 6 percent of students are LEP. Students with disabilities scored 38 percentage points lower than their non-disabled peers; 55 percent and 93 percent scored proficient or advanced, respectively.

2005 WRCT Performance

By Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students in the District

Economically Disadvantaged	No. of Districts	Students Tested	% Proficient and Advanced
50.0% or more	42	8,272	79
25.0% to 49.9%	172	24,032	91
5.0% to 24.9%	170	21,588	95
Less than 5.0%	43	3,276	94

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Percent Proficient and Advanced

	1998	2005
All Students	64.8	87.4
African American	46	69
American Indian	47	82
Asian	37	81
Hispanic	45	70
White	71	92
Students with Disabilities	18	55
Nondisabled	72	93
Limited English Proficient	16	59
English Proficient	68	89
Economically Disadvantaged	48	77
Not Economically Disadvantaged	73	93

(more)

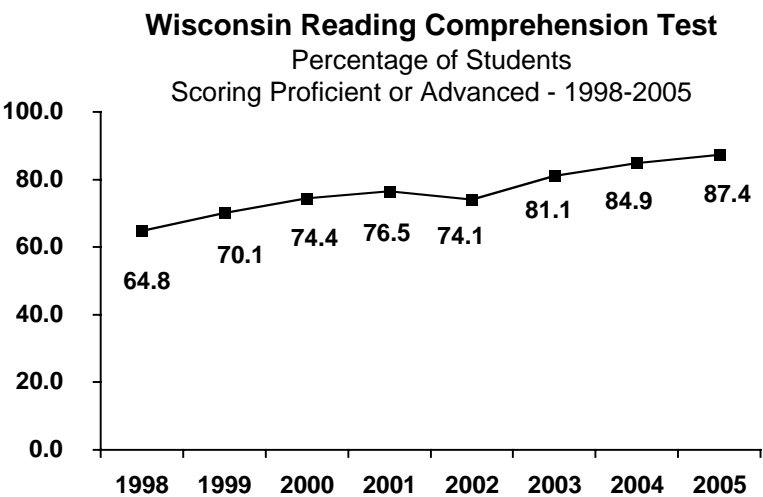
“We must stay the course in our efforts to close the achievement gap and support programs and activities that we know work,” Burmaster said. “Early learning opportunities through 4-year-old kindergarten, smaller class sizes through SAGE, quality teachers in every classroom and strong administrators in every school, and involvement by parents and local communities provide support that boosts students’ learning and will help us close the achievement gap,” Burmaster said.

The 2005 WRCT was developed by Wisconsin educators in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction and its testing contractor. It consisted of two paired reading passages and 53 multiple-choice and three short-answer reading comprehension questions. About 3 percent of students earned the maximum possible score on the test:

62 points. This was the last year the WRCT will be administered. Next year, third-graders will take the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations in reading and mathematics in fall.

Burmaster cautioned against evaluating entire schools and school districts based on one test given to third-graders. “While results for the

statewide reading test at third-grade are good news, it is normal for scores to fluctuate from one year to the next, especially for smaller groups of students. We have eight years of statewide WRCT data showing clearly improved reading achievement and an assessment of primary-level reading comprehension. We can and should celebrate the excellent performance by our students and the hard work of their teachers while we continue to focus attention on closing the achievement gap,” Burmaster said.



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NOTES: Background materials that include a description of proficiency levels, tables and graphs on student performance, and facts about the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test follow. Additional background data can be found on the Department of Public Instruction website < http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/spr_wrct.html >.

As a result of rounding, percentages may not total 100 percent.

Facts on the 2005 Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

An Assessment of Primary-Level Reading at Grade Three

- Administered between March 7 and 25, 2005.
- Taken by 57,168 public school third-grade students.
- Includes two related reading passages and 56 reading comprehension questions, seven of which asked students to make connections between the reading passages. An additional 34 items—asking questions about students' prior knowledge and reading strategies—provide background for interpreting results. As in past years, students who score higher on prior knowledge and reading strategies questions also tend to score higher on the reading comprehension test.
- Maximum score was 62 points: 53 points for the multiple-choice questions and nine points for the short-answer questions.
- Scored on performance standards for four proficiency levels.
 - Advanced = 55 through 62 points
 - Proficient = 29 through 54 points
 - Basic = 14 through 28 points
 - Minimal = 13 or fewer points
- Designed with four purposes:
 - 1) to identify the reading level of individual students with respect to statewide proficiency levels.
 - 2) to provide information that will help districts evaluate the effectiveness of their primary reading programs.
 - 3) to allow school districts to compare the performance of their students with state proficiency levels.
 - 4) to provide data for meeting federal and state statutory requirements regarding student assessment.
- Involved Wisconsin educators in developing the test and setting the performance standards.

2005 Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Based on Students Enrolled

Racial/Ethnic Group	Students Enrolled*	Percent Not Tested	Percent of Students Scoring				
			Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced	Combined Proficient and Advanced
African American	6,522	4	4	23	54	15	69
American Indian	869	4	2	12	55	27	82
Asian	2,184	9	1	9	48	33	81
Hispanic	4,376	20	1	9	49	21	70
White	45,458	2	1	5	44	48	92
Gender	Students Enrolled*	Percent Not Tested	Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced	Combined Proficient and Advanced
Female	28,761	4	1	6	44	45	89
Male	30,637	4	1	9	48	38	86
Other Demographic Groups	Students Enrolled*	Percent Not Tested	Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced	Combined Proficient and Advanced
Students with Disabilities	7,846	17	5	23	42	13	55
Nondisabled	51,485	1	1	5	47	46	93
Limited English Proficient	3,598	30	2	9	45	14	59
English Proficient	53,505	2	1	8	46	43	89
Economically Disadvantaged	19,026	7	2	14	54	23	77
Not Economically Disadvantaged	40,385	2	1	5	43	50	93

* Numbers do not equal total enrollment because of missing values on test booklets.

As a result of rounding, percentages may not total 100 percent.

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Percent Proficient and Advanced

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
All Students	64.8	70.1	74.4	76.5	74.1	81.1	84.9	87.4
African American	46	45	52	54	49	62	64	69
American Indian	47	58	63	68	64	74	80	82
Asian	37	43	48	56	58	72	78	81
Hispanic	45	47	51	49	49	58	65	70
White	71	77	80	83	81	86	90	92
Students with Disabilities	18	25	31	34	31	42	49	55
Nondisabled	72	77	81	83	81	87	91	93
Limited English Proficient	16	23	25	32	33	48	54	59
English Proficient	68	72	76	79	77	84	87	89
Economically Disadvantaged	48	52	56	59	57	67	73	77
Not Economically Disadvantaged	73	78	82	84	82	88	91	93

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Proficiency Levels

Advanced	Distinguished in the content area. Academic achievement is beyond mastery. Test scores provide evidence of in-depth understanding.
Proficient	Competent in the content area. Academic achievement includes mastery of the important knowledge and skills. Test scores show evidence of skills necessary for progress in reading.
Basic	Somewhat competent in the content area. Academic achievement includes mastery of most of the important knowledge and skills. Test scores show evidence of at least one major flaw in understanding.
Minimal	Limited achievement in the content area. Test scores show evidence of major misconceptions or gaps in knowledge and skills tested.

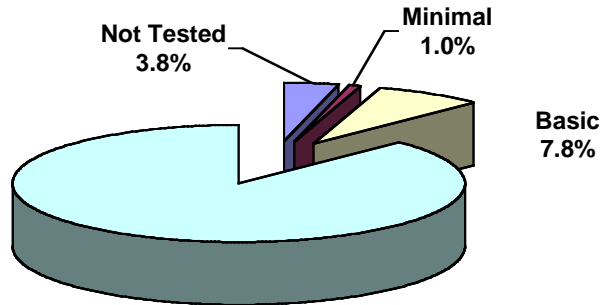
Students at Each Proficiency Level

Based on Students Enrolled

	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Not Tested	5,954	9.3	4,650	7.2	4,590	7.2	4,200	6.7	3,962	6.5	2,649	4.4	2,353	4.0	2,285	3.8
Minimal	3,240	5.1	3,784	5.9	2,570	4.0	2,329	3.7	3,368	5.5	2,537	4.2	780	1.3	607	1.0
Basic	13,260	20.8	10,814	16.8	9,094	14.3	8,219	13.1	8,510	13.9	6,320	10.4	5,757	9.7	4,619	7.8
Proficient	29,431	46.2	31,938	49.7	30,047	47.3	30,534	48.7	28,507	46.6	32,052	52.8	27,256	46.1	27,401	46.1
Advanced	11,880	18.6	13,096	20.4	17,274	27.2	17,425	27.8	16,874	27.6	17,189	28.3	22,919	38.8	24,541	41.3
Combined Proficient and Advanced	41,311	64.8	45,034	70.1	47,321	74.4	47,959	76.5	45,381	74.1	49,241	81.1	50,175	84.9	51,942	87.4
Total Enrolled	63,765		64,282		63,575		62,707		61,221		60,747		59,065		59,453	

2005 Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Students at each Proficiency Level



Combined Proficient
and Advanced 87.4 %

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Grade Three Enrollment and Testing Trends

Third Grade			Economically Disadvantaged		Students with Disabilities		Limited-English Proficient	
	Enrollment	Percent Not Tested	Percent of Total Enrollment	Percent Not Tested	Percent of Total Enrollment	Percent Not Tested	Percent of Total Enrollment	Percent Not Tested
1998	63,765	9.3	28.1	15	12.1	56	3.3	67
1999	64,282	7.2	29.5	13	12.7	38	3.9	61
2000	63,575	7.2	29.5	14	13.1	35	4.3	63
2001	62,707	6.7	28.8	13	13.4	32	4.6	55
2002	61,221	6.5	30.7	12	13.1	31	5.0	50
2003	60,747	4.4	31.6	8	13.1	22	5.3	31
2004	59,065	4.0	31.8	7	13.0	19	5.7	28
2005	59,453	3.8	32.0	7	13.2	17	6.1	30

WRCT Performance

Percent Proficient and Advanced

Year	Original SAGE*	Non-SAGE*	Statewide
1998	48	69	65
1999	56	74	70
2000	60	78	74
2001	68	80	77
2002	61	78	74
2003	72	84	81
2004	80	87	85
2005	81	89	87

* Includes 27 schools that participated in the first year of the SAGE program and 660 non-SAGE schools.